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Project Management of Local Government in Bangladesh: Challenges and Remedies

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Abstract: Local government is an integral part of the central government in Bangladesh while it is contemplated as a viable institution for socio-economic development at grassroots levels. The strategy of consummating a project in local government was kept changing with the changes of the regimes of different governments in the country. The study has been conducted depending on secondary sources with a comprehensive literature review. In this paper, several impediments in the way of managing projects in local government are found like political interference, scarcity of resource, bureaucratic complexities, lack of skilled manpower, inefficient monitoring and evaluating team, lack of accountability, lack of co-operation between political representatives and bureaucrats, corruption, time shortage, strike and demonstration, non-availability of land, effect of weather, lack of contingency plan for emergency situation, unrealistic contract duration and poor project management. In order to combat against these challenges, some effective weapons have been suggested those can be utilized on a regular and continuous basis in project management at local government of Bangladesh.

Key words: Local Government, Project Management, Challenges, Decentralization, Commensurability.

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I. INTRODUCTION

Local Government(LG) is an integral part of the central government of a country as it plays an important role in the development of the country. Almost all over the world, local government is considered as a viable institution for socio-economic development at sub national and grassroots levels. Bangladesh inherited the colonial structure of local government because our country was under the British Raj for two hundred years, and under Pakistan for around 24 years. During the British and Pakistani periods, different changes were fashioned to the LG structure. Even after independence, several changes were welcomed to the structure of the local government bodies under different regimes (PANDAY, 2011). So the strategy of completing a project in local government was also kept changing with the changes of regimes. The concept of a project success is split into two ingredients: project management success and project product success. Project management success looks into the management activities of project. Cost, time and quality objectives are the key variables for determining success in project management (Baccarini, 1999). Many projects are introduced in local government in Bangladesh but very often they are not successfully implemented for some uneven challenges which arise differently from different sources and these challenges not only disturb the development of LG but also debilitate the existing development of the area which is more dangerous and detrimental for the whole country. So this research will identify the challenges of project management(PM) in LG in Bangladesh and reveal some strategies to overcome them.

II. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The major purpose of the study is to point out practical obstacles to ensure effective project management in local government recommending some weapons. Specific objectives of the analysis are:

- 1. To identify the existing challenges of project management in local government.
- 2. To provide some rational, sophisticated and effective remedies towards securing better project management at local government in Bangladesh.

III. METHODS OF THE STUDY

The study has been conducted depending on secondary sources and analyzed based on the existing literature following qualitative analysis. Methodological strainers were applied to confine the literature through the segregation formula of the systematic review. The secondary data and information have been collected from

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the various text books, published research reports, periodicals and various works related to the projects of local government in Bangladesh which are entirely pertinent and ample to draw the objectives of this paper. Besides, information has been assembled in this study on the basis of various national and international journal articles which focused on project management of local government in Bangladesh. Draft prepared by local government engineering department (LGED), government of Bangladesh has also been reviewed to achieve the objectives of the study. Some appurtenant facts have been stockpiled from some of the major printed newspapers in Bangladesh. Many famous books published by some of the world's most illustrious publications are scrutinized for the comprehensive literature review. Article 59 of The Constitution of the People's Republic of Bangladesh has also been considered for orchestrating the research.

IV. PROJECT MANAGEMENT IN LOCAL GOVERNMENT: CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

A project is a temporary endeavor designed to produce a unique product, service or result with a defined beginning and end undertaken to meet specific goals and objectives, to bring about beneficial change or added value (Nokes, 2008). Project management is the supervision and control of the work required to complete the project vision. Project management is the practice of initiating, planning, implementing, controlling, and closing the work to achieve specific goals at the specified time. Generally there are three constrains of project management- schedule constraint, scope constraint and financial constraint. And, the primary challenge of project management is to achieve the project goals within the given constraints(Phillips, 2004). The objective of project management is also to shape or reform the client's objectives. In many cases the objective of project management is also to shape or reform the client's brief to feasibly address the client's objectives. Sometimes undefined or too tightly prescribed project management objectives are detrimental to decision making. Project management methodology can be applied to any project. It is often customized to a specific type of projects based on project size, nature and industry. For example, the construction industry has developed its own specialized form of project management which is called construction project management.

Localization project management includes many standard project management actions. It focuses on three important elements: time, quality and budget. Successful projects are completed on schedule, within budget, and according to quality standards(Esselink, 2000).

The success of any project depends on how well four key aspects are aligned with the contextual dynamics affecting the project; these are defined as the *four P's* (Mesly, 2017).

- Plan: The planning and forecasting activities of a project.
- Process: The overall approach to all activities and project governance.
- People: Including dynamics of how they collaborate and communicate.
- Power: Lines of authority, decision-makers, policies for implementation of the project.

Actually, no clear research has been conducted on local government's project management in Bangladesh. Project management in LG is the management practice to achieve specific goals of LG. There are some differences between project management in LG and PM in other sector. Time, Resource, money are the inevitable factors of a project. But there are also some other factors for successful project management in LG. Because every project has some differences from others. The main target of PM is to complete the project efficiently and effectively within time constraint using the given resources. The primary constraints are scope, time, quality and budget(PMI, 2013). So the calculated plan is must for a project in LG. Every project of LG has some stages and they are-

- I. Beginning / initiating stage
- II. Planning stage
- III. Implementing / Executing stage
- IV. Monitoring and controlling stage
- V. Completing/ closing stage

Project management coordination unit plays a pivotal role from starting stage to completing stage. Every stage is very challenging as there are many problems those may be appeared any time. Project management of local government in Bangladesh faces many problems from the initiating stage to closing stage because of many factors. But there are some rudimentary activities before beginning the work those are indispensible for a project. The rules, management principles, planning, and general guidelines for a project are the project management framework as the project management framework is the skeleton of projects(Phillips, 2004). In Bangladesh, there are many loopholes those are always dormant in the project management framework of local government. And these loopholes hinder the project's success of LG intermittently. So project

management in LG of Bangladesh will be improved by suggesting some effective solutions those will be conducive for every project of the country if the challenges can be identified.

V. CHALLENGES OF PROJECT MANAGEMENT IN LOCAL GOVERNMENT IN BANGLADESH

The existing situation of project management in LG of Bangladesh in terms of quality is not satisfactory. There are some causes behind the scenario and they are:

1. Political Interference and Instability:

Bangladesh has come through different political regimes since its independence. The regimes were divided into military and democratic regimes. It is a matter of great regret that almost first 20 years democratic regime was absent after its birth. The political situation was not stable during the two decades because of military rule. As a result, as the development of a newly born state was nothing but ceremonial, local government's condition was like a bottomless basket. There was no advancement in LG. Project management was nearly mismanaged. Bangladesh had a sigh of relief through the first democratic election in 1991. Then LG had been considered as an important sector for development through three consecutive democratic regimes. But Bangladesh is a well-known country throughout the world for its divulging nature of the political direction(Seddiky, 2019). Last two regimes there was some advancement in project management in LG. But it was not like our expectation due to prevailing strike, demonstration, violence. Apart from that, very often it's seen that central politicians, members of parliament had direct influenced over projects in local government which was a barrier to carry out or to implement those smoothly to foster local government development. Sometimes that over interference on project management brought a bad result and the projects were stopped or mal implemented. The unnecessary interference of law makers in the implementation process is very disruptive, which debilitates the development process and the role of the members of parliament in the executive organ hinders the separation of power in local governance(Rahman A., 2019). If the national law makers control and dominate local bodies, it would lose its principal peculiarity. Because local problems are different in nature as compared to those of the national government (Rahman & Zaman, 2004).

2. Scarcity of Resource:

As Bangladesh is a developing country, resources are not sufficient to develop a sector properly. Therefore, in Bangladesh local self-government is not so strong as their needs. So they have to depend on central government for their budget. It is taken for granted that the LG bodies in Bangladesh suffer from inadequate financial resources (PANDAY, 2011). But lack of adequate fiscal resources, lack of the revenue sources of local government and a degree of interference from member of the parliament with regard to the use of funds are actual problems(Rahman A., 2019). Sometimes projects are stopped because of not having enough resources to carry out. And central government is not always ready to finance as it has to maintain other sectors. The revenue is too poor to manage their demanding projects in a particular area as the sources of revenue are not enough. Financial aspects of a project like tax, budget and allocation of resources have been controlled by Central government through its administrative hierarchy(Sharmin, Haque, & Islam, 2012).

3. Bureaucratic Complexities:

Bureaucrats are responsible for implementing policies for the welfare of the people so that they have to be efficient. But sometimes they play rent seeking behavior which is very detrimental for the society and the actual development of the country. They often try to think them powerful, that's why they become lazy and incompetent. They serve their own interests rather than public interest. They seek loopholes for corruption though they don't want to say, that is corruption rather it's nothing but rent seeking. But it's more or less true that rent seeking is a upgrade form of corruption in respect to the bureaucrats. And local government in Bangladesh is typically dominated by central bureaucrats and politicians (Rahman A. , 2019). That's why their role debilitates in the performance of project management in local government. Sometimes bureaucrats create a channel of corruption with some notorious persons in particular area. So that they have to maintain the liaison with corrupted politicians which catastrophically destroys the project management in local government. They also create another factor during a project implementation and demand more resources to the central government for carrying out the projects in local government. But it's totally a drama of gaining further interests via the process.

4. Lack of Skilled Manpower:

There are some factors of a project team like project coordinators, team members, their skills and competencies which give impact to the success of the project(Sudhakar, 2016). A project's performance ultimately depends on skilled manpower. If there is absence of skilled persons, the project is not successfully

managed and implemented in spite of having availability of resources and bureaucratic competence. There is a huge lack of skilled manpower in local government. So they can't work strategically, efficiently and effectively.

5. Inefficient Monitoring and Evaluating team:

No viable system of auditing has been introduced so far to cope with the large number of local self-government (Islam, 2015). To what degree a project is being successful or what is the present situation of a project during its implementation can be noticed and understood by the monitoring and evaluating team. So their efficiency is must for accurate evaluation. Many projects failed in local govt.'s projects due to inefficient monitoring and evaluating team. They can't evaluate to the point of a project which brings inefficiency in level. In the past, project evaluation has largely focused on whether a project carries out the activities on time and within budget. But now the objective of monitoring and evaluation is to ascertain whether activities are progressing as per schedule and the timelines are being met (LGED, 2010). Proper monitoring may improve the capability of managing resource for the project and implementing the project (Billah, 2016).

6. Lack of Accountability:

Accountability is one of the ineluctable factors which are indispensable for ensuring good governance. It is the best way to build the government's capacity. As Bangladesh moves onto middle-income status, ensuring accountability is inevitable and it is must for sustainable democracy as well. The stronger the accountability exists in a country, the stronger the democracy is practiced in that country(Kader, 2019). The LG bodies are not found accountable and transparent in their activities where all actions should be taken in a transparent way, because accountability and transparency are considered as two important features of good governance (PANDAY, 2011). Accountability in local government in Bangladesh is nearly absent in practice. So nobody cares what s/he does. So that there is a chance to have corruption which ultimately destroys the project management in local government though there is an existing accountability process. So lack of accountability instigates to indulge in corruption which decreases the performance of project management.

7. Lack of Co-ordination between Political Representatives and Bureaucrats:

In local government, there is a structure of its own where many elected and selected members are available. The experience of ensuring sound coordination between the local government bodies and the officials working at the local level is not quite satisfactory in Bangladesh (PANDAY, 2011). So, strong coordination between political representatives and bureaucrats is necessary for better project management in local government. But it's very often seen that political representatives want to do a thing in a way where bureaucrats are interested to do that in a different way. Even sometimes one gives veto to implement a project in a particular area or a project is stopped in the middle of project implementation due to having the lack of their co-operation and coordination. Lack of integration of local plans and limitation of holistic, strategic and targeted application of local level resources towards development challenges are real. There is no sufficient linkage with the upazila councils and the local office of line agencies represented there(Rahman A., 2019).

8. Corruption:

Now as corruption has been embraced to all levels of the country, local government is not out of that touch. There is more space for corruption at the local level due to the profane nexus between the politicians and bureaucrats and more facultative power of the local officials to create unscrupulous liaison with local lobby group in their long stay at the local level than national level bureaucrats (Prud'homme, 1995). Corruption is a challenge in cost management of local government's projects (Billah, 2016). Actually it could hardly be found a single project of local government where there was no corruption. The effectiveness of project management varies as the range of corruption varies in different projects of LG.

9. Time Shortage:

Though a schedule or fixed time is allocated for the implementation of a particular project in LG, sometimes it's impossible to complete a project within the scheduled time because of many reasons. Very often an elected member has short time in his/her hand to complete the project because his/her tenure has very short time to over. That's why the project is completed very fast, so that it may not be implemented effectively. And each project team has to maintain a specific timeframe within which the project must be implemented as different funding sources determine different schedules. Moreover, delay in implementation of the project creates uncertainty and doubt among the people about the project in local government(Billah, 2016).

10. Contractor's Influence:

The government is considered as a principal where contractor plays as an agent. Sometimes the contractor has a tendency to use the construction materials as worse and less as possible. And there is an illegal

nexus among contractors, local level representatives and government officials to make money for themselves (Billah, 2016). So contractors have an influence on the projects of LG. Mostly their influence over project management diminishes the value of project management which adversely affects the particular region of local government.

11. Lack of People's Participation:

As Upazila Parishad is a tier of local government, it consists of many members where there is people's participation through their elected representatives. But general citizens have no opportunity for direct participation in decision making process of project management in LG which very often makes a scope to do corruption for others brings an uncertainty of successful implementation of the project. The needs of the general people are not always considered in the development activities. Moreover a development initiative sees daylight when it fulfills interest of some powerful people in the locality (Billah, 2016).

12. Lack of Contingency Plan for Emergency Situation:

The projects those are taken for implementation in local level may face an unexpected or uneven situation during its execution. So there should be a proper plan to face the emergency situation. But many probable and potential projects are postponed because of not having contingency plan for facing emergency situation. So risk identification must be in place because it is the process of identifying the risks and then it emphasizes on documenting how their presence can affect the project (Phillips, 2004).

VI. SOME REMEDIES FOR PROPER PROJECT MANAGEMENT OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT IN BANGLADESH

1. Developing Ethics in Politicians and Bureaucrats:

Local bureaucrats or officials play dominant role than local elected politicians in the decision making process. So the imbalance that characterized conflictual relations between politicians and bureaucrats at the national level could also be noticeable at local level (Rahman M. S., 2010). If politicians and bureaucrats are principled, moral and ethical in practice, almost all things will be easier. So politicians and bureaucrats must develop their ethics for proper project management in local government.

2. Participatory Citizen's Watchdog Forum:

Apart from political representatives, there must be citizen's watchdog forum where people will participate in the decision making process and in the project management in local level and where all stakeholders connected to the projects of LG will be accountable for their actions. As a matter of fact, decentralization provides a space for local people to participate in local development that can ensure efficient allocation and mobilization of local resources with an improved accountability system (Rahman A. , 2019). In local level, women are more likely perfect as local government managers than their male counterparts regarding the communication, inspiration of the citizen to attract in the local decision-making process (Seddiky, 2019). The Government should incorporate the views of different civil society organizations into planning and implementing the local government policy (PANDAY, 2011).

3. Actual Decentralization of Authority:

Decentralization of local government institution can originate proper values for local self-government through creating political leadership, ensuring popular participation and developing an accountable administration that helps to plan and implement people-oriented development process. It is not only a political process of creating accountability but also is the best means to bring government closer to people and institutionalizing democracy (Islam, 2015). When analyzing the decentralization practices of different governments in Bangladesh, it is evident that the local government bodies have never been established as "self-governing" bodies in their true sense. These bodies can certainly be identified as an extension of the central government where the scope for participation of local people is very limited. As a result, the management of the local government bodies has been found to be poor (PANDAY, 2011). Proper project management in LG depends on original decentralization of its authority. Though the authority is decentralized in Bangladesh, but it's actually different in practice in the project management in LG. So it's important to decentralize the authority indeed for better project management in LG. To solve the problems, decentralization will be an effective mechanism, which is an essential component of democratization, good governance and citizen engagement(Rahman A., 2019).

4. Enhancing Sources of Revenue:

When local government wants to implement a project, they have to depend on budget from central government. The sources of their income are generally taxes, rates, fees and charges levied by the local body,

and rents and profits accruing from properties of the local body and sums received through its services(Sharmin, Haque, & Islam, 2012). So very often it's difficult to work smoothly due to not having enough self-fund. That's why the sources of revenue should be augmented for the development and for becoming bona fide local self-government. So that projects of LG are accomplished immaculately. Participation of people in open budget session should also be secured which will identify insufficiency and inefficacy and create scope for new policy recommendations that will make a bridge between local government and people(Rahman A., 2019).

5. Commensurability:

The commensurability principle means that there should be a balance between the total revenue of local authorities and their mandatory functions (Brand, 2016). It connotes the equilibrium between revenue and expenditure of LG. The expenditure of a local government ought to be commensurate to the revenue or income of the local government. For example- a particular project requires more resources for its proper implementation. So at that time the prospective sources of revenue need to be aggrandized. On the other hand, the expenses should not be so much high that is very impossible to cover with the existing revenue or income. Moreover proper supervision and monitoring can make difference in cost management of local government's projects (Billah, 2016). So it will also assist to control the additional costs of project management in LG of Bangladesh.

6. Updating Website:

There must be an active website for a particular local government area where all activities taken by local government will be appeared. All information about the projects those will be taken, those are being implemented and those will be executed will be available there and the website must be updated in regular basis. There must be free access to the particular website for the citizens of the region. A citizens' charter is the expression of understanding between citizens and the provider of a public service with respect to the quantity and quality of service which will also be visible in the website (Khan, 2008).

7. Modern Training System and Strong Evaluating Team:

As the performance of a project management depends on skilled manpower and efficient evaluating team, there must be modern training system and mechanisms in LG through which skilled manpower, effective monitoring team and proper evaluating body can be prepared for better project management in Bangladesh. The National Institute of Local Government (NILG) should be bifurcated into the National Institute of Urban Local Government (NIULG) and the National Institute of Rural Local Government (NIRLG) for ensuring proper training at both urban and rural levels (Sharmin, Haque, & Islam, 2012). Vigorous evaluation team is requisite for getting an update on the ongoing projects of LG. Because effective management and monitoring of the decentralized administration is a key to strengthening local Administration (Sharmin, Haque, & Islam, 2012).

8. Accountability and Transparency:

Accountability and transparency at the local level must be in a visible manner and open budget is an innovative initiative to ensure transparency which also recognizes the aspirations and needs of the community (Islam, 2015). The existing accountability and transparency system of LG should be moderated and updated where all stakeholders will be accountable. Like all local government members will be accountable to member of parliament of particular area, all elected members will be accountable to the government appointed officials and finally all will be accountable to the participatory citizen's watchdog forum which is suggested in this article for proper project management in LG. Qualitative changes in the management of public affairs should be implemented for effective accountability (Kader, 2019). In the local government sphere, accountability enhances sound financial management where transparency requires simplicity, clarity and understandability of government and a free flow of information concerning the affairs of the state(Brand, 2016).

9. Proper Co-ordination:

There must be coordination not only between elected representatives and selected officials but also among elected members, appointed officials and citizen's watchdog forum. The monitoring team will also monitor whether the coordination prevails or cooperation is absent in the project management of LG. And finally participatory citizen's watchdog forum should be given proper authority to check and monitor all things. Effective local institutions can formulate and implement policies in line with the citizen's aspirations that can improve the quality of public services and thereby promoting local development(Rahman A. , 2019).

10. Salary of Representatives and Officials:

The salary or honorarium of Chairman and members of local government should be amplified for combating the corruption level in LG which will be conducive for better project management in local level of

Bangladesh. Apart from that, the employees and officials of local level should also be given proper remuneration for effective project completion at local level in Bangladesh.

11. Proper Instruments to Face Emerging Situation:

Project risk identification is the process of predicting the key risk outcomes that something is going wrong in a project (Maylor, 2010). Risk management and proper contingency plan must be available with proper instruments and skilled manpower to meet uneven incidents during project implementation in LG.

12. Legal Autonomy:

Many local government experts asseverated that the autonomy of local government is nothing but ceremonial. The exact relationship between national and local government is as a clear patron-client relationship(Siddiqui, 2005). Limited powers, functions and jurisdiction of local government are all delegated by central government, which retains a high degree of overall control in both rural and urban areas. This effectively limits the autonomy and efficiency of local government(Sharmin, Haque, & Islam, 2012). So they can't work ungrudgingly. Local government should be provided absolute autonomy to take any decision for better project management and should also be bestowed proper freedom to create sources of revenue and determine the tax rates in particular area. They should also be given independence to select the sectors where the revenue will be expensed. The devolution of real power to localities is considered as one of the powerful mechanisms to establish effective local government system(Rahman A., 2019).

VII. CONCLUSION

Different regimes changed, and different types of government shaped the local government system according to their own, but local government system is still a very popular concept in Bangladesh due to its physical proximity and citizen-centric approach (Seddiky, 2019). It is impossible to realize national development goals without proper and accelerated project management in local government of Bangladesh. But persistent political and administrative interference in the project management has made it ineffective. If recommendations which have been given on this study are fully applied, it must bring a change in project management in local government in Bangladesh. To ensure the better service of project management in local government in Bangladesh, budget formulation and implementation process must be transparent, accountable and participative which guarantees almost zero corruption and that is ample to provide a model local government which is not only the sole demand of all people of Bangladesh, but also ineluctable for betterment of the citizens as well as for sustainable development. Therefore, in order to solve the problems fruitfully, the local bodies should not be used as the tools of the central government for achieving their political purposes (Sharmin, Haque, & Islam, 2012). Only then well-organized and sophisticated stream can be resurged in the project management in local government of Bangladesh.

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58 |Page